

MENNONITE HISTORICAL BULLETIN

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An Unrecorded Edition of Menno Simons' Tract on Christian Baptism

IRVIN B. HORST

The writings of Menno Simons have gone through three stages in regard to their printing history. Originally they appeared as separate tracts much in the form of modern day pamphlets. Some of them were reprinted during Menno's lifetime. By 1562, however, they took the form of a handbook in which the *Fundament-Boek* (Foundation of Christian Doctrine), his most important work, appeared along with seven other writings. This handbook was reprinted many times in the 16th century in Dutch and in German translation. It was brought to America and reprinted here in German as well as in English translation. A third stage was reached in the Netherlands with the publication of the collected writings, in various stages of completeness, in 1600, 1646, and 1681. In America the collected writings appeared first in English, *The Complete Works of Menno Simon* (Elkhart, 1871), and later in German, *Die vollstaendigen Werke Menno Simons* (Elkhart, 1876-1881), 2 vols. *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons* (Scottdale, 1956), is the most definitive edition of his collected works.

Individual tracts of Menno, then, were seldom reprinted after the early period. Menno's account of his conversion and renunciation of Rome appeared often as a separate work, but this was actually an excerpt from one of his longer books, *Reply to Gellius Faber* (1554). The reprint, *Tractaten over den doop, het avondmaal, enz.* (Amsterdam, 1892), by C. P. van Eeghen, Jr., consisted of excerpts from the *Foundation of Christian Doctrine*.

A reprint which has recently come to light is a German translation of Menno's book on baptism, *Verclarunghe des christelycken doopsels*, which first appeared in 1539. This edition is without an imprint, that is, without the place or date of publication and the name of the publisher. An examination of the typography and the signatures of the gatherings shows clearly that it is



Facsimile of the title page of Menno Symons, *Erklärung der christlichen Taufe*, a German translation and separate edition published in America in the 19th century. It has no imprint to indicate the place and date of publication and the publisher. For a discussion of this unrecorded edition of Menno Simons' work on Christian baptism see the accompanying article. The facsimile shown here is from the copy in the Historical Library at Eastern Mennonite College, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

an American imprint from the 19th century, probably from before the Civil War. The title page carries the following explanation about the translation: "Gedruckt (in holländischer Sprache) im Jahr unsers Herrn 1600, Nun aber treulich und fleißig ins Deutsche uebersetzt von einem Wahrheitsfreund." The only Dutch edition of 1600 which contains this tract on baptism is the collected edition, *Sommarie ofte by een vergaderinge van sommige schriftelijcke Bekentenissen des Gheloofs*, published at Hoorn in 1600. This separate American reprint uses "y" in the spelling of "Menno Symons," as does the Dutch edition of 1600, which may provide another clue as to the source used for the translation, although both of the later col-

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The 1868 Meeting of Ohio Mennonite Conference

(Wilmer D. Swope, Leetonia, Ohio, copied this report of the 1868 Ohio Mennonite Conference from an undated but recent reprint published by the Wisler Mennonites of Ohio. This report had not appeared in the *Herald of Truth*, and its existence was not generally known. Brother Swope deserves the credit for bringing this to our attention. Ed.)

The annual conference of the Mennonites in Ohio, according to previous appointment, was held on the 15th day of May, 1868 in Nolt's (NOLD'S) Meeting-house, in Columbiana County, where more than 30 Bishops, Ministers, and Deacons were present from Ohio, Indiana, and Canada. The following is the decision of this conference:

1st. Ministers shall seek diligently to conduct themselves and keep house according to the Word of God.

2nd. The non-resistant doctrine shall in all things be strictly upheld and carried out, not only in taking up the sword or using the authorities, etc., but in our whole walk and conduct.

3rd. All ministers shall be careful in receiving applicants into the church, that they be not too fast in baptizing them before good works or fruits do appear, true repentance and a change of heart shown in their conduct.

4th. In choosing ministers the attention of the church shall be drawn thereto and shall seek for men who are intelligent, well grounded in the faith, and who lead a godly and zealous life. Then in the fear of the Lord shall votes be taken, and those who are voted for be examined to see whether they are well grounded in the faith and doctrine, then shall the Lot be cast for the desired member.

5th. When a brother or sister of our church shall marry a person who is not a member, it shall be acknowledged as a transgression not only against the rules of the church, but also against the gospel; such

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THE 1868 MEETING

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shall they confess before they are received into membership again.

6th. In regard as to whether a brother or sister in case of adultery one or the other may be divorced, was unanimously considered that we have no permission in the gospel to take a writing of divorcement, neither have we (in such circumstances) permission to marry again.

7th. We must be a separate people. We dare not take part in the worldly buying and selling patent-rights.

8th. There shall no custom be made in holding night meetings; but when ministers are on a journey, where there are sick, old or infirm persons it shall be allowed.

9th. The rule given in Matthew 18:15-18 shall in all cases be strictly observed where dissatisfaction occurs between brothers or sisters.

10th. Every minister shall seek to labor faithfully in the duties of his own office and not interfere with another office.

11th. Every minister shall be diligent to observe the church rules according to as they have been practiced hitherto, and shall seek to maintain and uphold the same and not bring any new customs.

12th. We also acknowledge the 18 chief articles and as accepted at Dordrecht (Dortrecht) in 1632, as being in accordance, to keep the same faith and ordinance of our church.

13th. The next conference is to be held in Martin's Meetinghouse, the 3rd Friday in May, 1869.

AN UNRECORDED EDITION

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lected Dutch editions of 1646 and 1681 have the same spelling.

In regard to the occasion for reprinting this work in America we are left entirely in the dark. Since this tract does not appear in any of the handbook editions of the *Foundation of Christian Doctrine* with the other appended works, there was obviously interest in making available an additional writing by Menno Simons. Aside from this separate imprint American readers were not able to read the work on baptism until the appearance of the complete works in English in 1871 and in German in 1876-1881.

One may surmise that the translation and publication of this tract on baptism had some connection with the controversy between Mennonites and Dunkards, as well as with other groups, regarding the mode of baptism. This is the tract

which some Dunkard leaders used to suggest that Menno taught immersion. In the title of this work and in the text Menno speaks of "*des christelycken doopsels in den Water*." It is a misconstruing of the connotation of these words, however, to suggest that Menno had the method of immersion in mind. The context makes it clear that Menno here means simply "Christian baptism by water." He stated it this way to distinguish from later references in the book to baptism by the Spirit and by fire. The separate American imprint gives prominence to this terminology, particularly in the first main subtitle of the book where "von der Taufe im Wasser" is printed in large bold type. Neither this imprint nor the recent English collected edition of 1956 provide a literal translation of the Dutch at this point. The German imprint has: "Hier folgt eine Abhandlung von der Taufe im Wasser, und erstlich von dem Befehl Jesu Christi, dieselbe betreffend." The English 1956 edition has "Explanation of Christian Baptism." The original Dutch has, "Verklaringe des christelycken doopsels in den Water uyt 't Woordt Godts." This should be translated no doubt as, "An explanation from God's Word about baptism by water." The American imprint also emphasizes "Befehl Jesu Christi" by spacing the letters of these words. Is it possible that this tract was translated and published by non-Mennonites? The anonymity of the work also prompts this question. The copy of this book here considered, which is now in the Historical Library at Eastern Mennonite College, was found among some old books in an attic at Dayton, Virginia. Was it printed in the Shenandoah Valley at the time of the controversy between Mennonites and Dunkards about the mode of baptism? A comparison of the typography with the Henkel German imprints indicates that it was not printed at New Market. No German books were printed at Singers Glen by Funk & Sons, 1847-1877. It may be an early Harrisonburg imprint, and if so it dates from the early part of the 19th century for no German books were printed at this place after 1820.

One purpose in reporting the existence of this book is to bring it to the attention of curators of rare Mennonite and of scholars who are at home in the field of American Mennonite history. It is not recorded in any bibliography and no copy is at present extant in any of our Mennonite historical libraries. Also, it is not recorded in the Union Catalogue of the Library of Congress. We may therefore speak of it at this stage as unrecorded. Are additional

copies known to exist? What was the occasion for the publication of this pamphlet? Why has it been unknown in Mennonite circles?

A description of the pamphlet is as follows:

Title Page: Menno Symons / Erklæring / der christlichen Taufe / in dem Wasser aus dem Wort Gottes, / auf welche Weise sie von Christo Jesu befohlen, / und von seinen heiligen Apostelen gelehrt und / geuebt worden ist. / Einen andern Grund kan niemand legen ausser dem, / gelegt ist, welcher is Christus Jesus. I Cor. 3. / Gedruckt (in hollaendischer Sprache) / im Jahr unsers Herrn 1600, / Nun aber treulich und fleissig ins Deutsche uebersetzt / von einem / Wahrheitsfreund. / [rule]

Collation: Octavo (18 cm.), 1-7⁶, 8³.

Pagination: Paginated from 1 to 90. The first fifteen pages are paginated with Roman and the remaining pages with Arabic numerals.

Contents: (p. 1) title page; (p. 2) blank; (pp. 3-4) "(Zuschrift aus dem Lateinischen uebersetzt.) M.S. wuenschet seinen lateinischen Lesern Heil"; pp. 5-15 "Vorrede des Autors"; pp. 15-90 text; p. 90 "Gaudet sponsa Christi." This edition follows closely the text in the Dutch editions of the collected works; however it translates the Latin introduction but not the Latin postscript.

Greatly perturbed the circle of Grebel and Mantz met together. What was to be done? They understood well that much more was involved than the question of infant baptism. They realized that a choice was necessary: either they had to relinquish entirely their ideal of a church after the apostolic pattern and return to the church, which was a State Church, and in their eyes relatively little different from the Church of Rome; or they had to break radically with all that was old and venture further along the new, untried way. What this meant to persons who knew only the medieval conception of authority, we can hardly imagine. To them it meant to oppose every aspect of this authority, every power over them, secular as well as spiritual, and to undermine the central pillar of religious life in the Middle Ages—an uncritical subjection to the Church and the State. This, then, was done. Courage was present, or, rather, faith was great enough to reverse the sails and steer against the stream.

—N. Van der Zijpp, *Geschiedenis der Doopsgezinden*, p. 12.

Mennonite Research News and Notes

MELVIN GINGERICH

William Keeney, assistant professor of Bible at Bluffton College, received his Ph.D. degree *cum laude* from Hartford Theological Seminary on May 20. He did his work in historical theology and wrote his dissertation on "The Development of Thought and Practice Among the Dutch Anabaptists from 1539 to 1564." In 1957 he completed a master's thesis on Dirk Philips, His Life, His Writings and His Teaching Concerning the Church.

University of Manitoba degrees granted on May 20, 1959, included the following:

Victor John Peters, "All Things Common—The Hutterians of Manitoba," M.A. degree;

John Jacob Bergen, "An Historical Study of Education in the Municipality of Rhineland," M. Ed.

Indiana University granted the Ph.D. degree to Mary Eleanor Bender on June 8, 1959. Her dissertation topic was "The Sixteenth-Century Anabaptists as a Theme in Twentieth-Century German Literature (1900-1957)."

Peter F. Bergen has completed a Ph.D. dissertation on the Mennonites of Alberta at the University of Alberta.

The July 1959 *Mennonite Quarterly Review* contains a thirty-five page extract from Herbert Klassen's master's thesis. The article is entitled "The Life and Teachings of Hans Hut."

John C. Wenger concluded his study of "Jacob Wisler and the Old Order Mennonite Schism of 1872 in Elkhart County, Indiana" in the July 1959 *Mennonite Quarterly Review*.

The first two secretary books of General Conference which had been thought lost recently came into the possession of the Mennonite Church Archives. They cover the years 1897-1935.

Mrs. J. N. Smucker, Goshen, Indiana, recently donated a collection of photographs and portraits to the Mennonite Church Archives. These came from the home of her father Melvin Lantz (1867-1957), Topeka, Indiana.

The J. N. Durr (1853-1934) papers and historical documents have recently been deposited in the Mennonite Church Archives.

The widow of the late Huber Yoder, Elkhart, Indiana, recently deposited with the Archives, a collection of Jonas S. Hartzler (1857-1953) materials. Brother Yoder had been

working on a biography of J. S. Hartzler at the time of his untimely death.

The Jacob Burkhard (1873-1906) letters written from India in 1902-03 and until recently in the possession of his widow Mary Burkhard have been donated to the Mennonite Church Archives by their son Samuel T. Burkhard of Worthington, Ohio.

The May 1959 number of *The Palimpsest* is devoted to "The Mennonites in Iowa" by Melvin Gingerich. In this work Dr. Gingerich condenses and brings up to date his book on the same subject. An added feature is the large number of photographs of historical note. Copies may be obtained from the State Historical Society, Iowa City, for the price of fifty cents each. (I.B.H.)

Gabriel Sager (1734-1816), Pioneer Ohio Mennonite Preacher

Gabriel Sager, son of Baltzer and Elizabeth Sager, was born in Bavaria or Baden, Germany, July 24, 1734, a weaver by trade and Mennonite preacher; died Jan. 31, 1816; married April 8, 1762, Margaretta Delphin, daughter of John and Margaretta Delphia, born in Klein Biberau, Germany, Sept. 26, 1737, died Aug. 28, 1822. According to Isaac W. Sager, Gabriel Sager accompanied by four brothers, Jacob, Adam, John and Philip, came to America in 1756, and settled in New Jersey. Soon thereafter they settled in Bucks Co., Pa., and on Sept. 27, 1765, Gabriel was naturalized by the Commonwealth of Pa. (the certificate being now in the possession of one of the direct descendants, Frank J. Sager, Carizozo, New Mexico). He lived in Bucks Co., at least ten years, how much longer is unknown, then moved to Shenandoah Co., Va., and from there to N. Bristol, Trumbull Co., Ohio, in 1808, where he and his wife died. They had eight children, the fourth being William, who preceded him to Ohio. Gabriel when a young man made several trips to America. On one occasion the vessel was driven northerly by the winds out of its course and another time it was pursued by whales. They were diverted by throwing empty barrels into the sea. Escaping this peril they confronted hunger. Their stock of provisions became exhausted and they were driven to eat rats that infested the ship.

Finally after a stormy voyage of 18 weeks they reached their port.

On the fourth of June 1805, Mr. and Mrs. Sager with their son Joseph, three years of age, settled at N. Bristol, Ohio, where there were less than half dozen families living then and very few in adjoining townships. Tired, and worn from the long trip they went to the home of Mr. Sager's brother-in-law, Abraham Baughman, for their first night's rest in the wilds of northeastern Ohio. The next morning the two men blazed their way through the forest to select a site for Sager's future home. A farm of 350 acres was purchased from Alfred Wolcott. A part of the purchase price, \$300.00, was brought from Virginia in silver dollars. Sager loaned his saddle bags to Wolcott to carry this money away. While waiting for a log house to be constructed the family lived for four weeks in the covered wagon or moving van which they brought with them from Virginia. There was not a sawed piece of wood in the building. The floor, roof and doors were all made of puncheons split from the surrounding timber. The cabin was 18 by 20 feet and had but one room, yet when half the floor was laid, the family moved in. Their first bedstead occupied one corner. It was made by boring holes in the walls in which were inserted the ends of the side and end rails, the other ends were fastened to the only post used. Some years later Mr. Sager built a commodious frame house which is still in good repair. He built the first flour mill in his township for Abraham Baughman the next year after coming to Bristol, then later built one on his farm for himself, which he operated in connection with his farm work. Mr. Sager's father, Gabriel, a Mennonite minister, organized the first church in Bristol Twp., in 1808, and taught the first school (German) in 1810-11 when he and his brother Samuel and a few others built the first schoolhouse in 1812, where North Bristol now stands. He never identified himself with any local church, but observed the forms of family worship and lived honorably. Formerly family meetings were held in his father's residence. He was of a kindly disposition and was liked by all with whom he came in contact, but he cared little for society and rarely visited his children after their marriage, but always welcomed them at his own home and took great pleasure in their companionship.

[Selected from *History of the Descendants of John Hottel* (Strasburg, Virginia, 1930), by Wilmer D. Swope, Leetonia, Ohio.]

Book Review

History of the Pennsylvania Mennonite Church in Kansas. By Emma King Risser. Published by the Pennsylvania Mennonite Church, Hesston, Kansas, 1958. Pp. xii, 95. \$2.50.

At a time when the nature of the church and the character of our own church life are under serious consideration, one welcomes the appearance of the history of a Mennonite congregation whose spiritual vigor was strong and whose influence in the development of Mennonite life was unusually large. Written by a member who has experienced the life of the congregation through all but about its first two decades, the book gives an intimate insight into the spiritual aspirations and strivings of the group as expressed in the various developing aspects of their congregational life. The very style and underlying spirit of the writing is a representation of the church life being reported. It was the author's purpose to evaluate the happenings about which she reports in the light of her own deep spiritual interests and concerns and to let the book be an added witness to the Christian faith and life which it portrays.

This inside view is given in topical rather than chronological form, each chapter reporting one activity or aspect of the church life through its entire history. Facts and dates are clearly stated for the careful student. A historian might wish for more explicit reference to and interpretation of the various influences that gave impetus to the spiritual life of the group, as well as the impact this congregation has made on the life and activity of the Mennonite church at large, but for the informed Mennonite historian at least some of these are implicit.

The book reveals that beginning in about 1880 Mennonites from Lancaster County and Amish from Mifflin County, Pennsylvania, who came as pioneers to Harvey County, Kansas, formed the Pennsylvania Church, located northwest of Newton. With the Catlin, Spring Valley, and West Liberty congregations in neighboring counties it shared the pioneer Mennonite life of the Kansas prairie. The vision and spirit of its leaders, notably Reuben J. Heatwole, who came from Virginia, early vitalized the life of the congregation. "Uncle Reuben" also was instrumental in bringing in his cousin, John S. Coffman, who with other early evangelists set the tone for the fruitful years of development over the next generation. Local leaders, of whom T. M. Erb was most prominent, caught the spark and carried

on a deep spiritual concern and an aggressive program.

It is evident that the spirit of the Pennsylvania Church has had a wide influence through the missionaries and church leaders who came from this congregation. Although only incidental mention of the school is made in the book, it is known that Hesston College sprang largely from the concern and efforts of the Pennsylvania congregation, with T. M. Erb giving prominent leadership. The forthcoming history of Hesston College by Mary Miller, scheduled to appear in 1959, will supplement the story of the Pennsylvania congregation in this important aspect of its church-wide influence.

The history of the Pennsylvania Church is a grass-roots example of the great awakening in the Mennonite Church, both in its own vital congregational life and in its contribution to this church-wide awakening.

—Paul Bender

Fiftieth Anniversary of West Clinton-Lockport Mennonite Churches. Compiled by Orland Grieser, Wauseon, Ohio, 1958. Available from Home Book Store, 404 Brussel Street, Archbold, Ohio. Pp. 32. 65¢.

Fiftieth Anniversary of the West Clinton Mennonite Church. Compiled by Orland Grieser, Wauseon, Ohio, 1958. Available from Home Book Store, 404 Brussel Street, Archbold, Ohio. Pp. 20. 55¢.

These booklets were published in conjunction with the fiftieth anniversary of the Lockport and West Clinton congregations in Fulton County, Ohio. The anniversary event was celebrated on October 5, 1958.

In 1908 the agitation for a second meeting house in the west end of the settlement crystallized and resulted in a decision to build a meeting house in the east end as well as the west end. The original church was located in the central area. From these Amish Mennonite beginnings has developed an integrated Mennonite community which today provides a rich opportunity as a laboratory for the study of the constant cultural, social, and economic transition which is occurring in many Mennonite communities.

The pictures of church buildings at various periods are helpful. Even more so are the separate calendars of events. A map showing the locations of the several congregations would help the unfamiliar reader. There are a few mistakes, evidently printing errors, but the compiler, who is a native of the area, is to be commended for making these booklets available at such a strategic time. The treatments are brief, but the reader will want to watch for

the appearance in 1950 of a more complete history of the whole community which is scheduled to coincide with the one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of the Central congregation which is the mother church.

—Samuel L. Horst

The Fred and Sarah (Yoder) Swartzendruber History: A Story of Their Faith and Life, With Historical, Genealogical and Religious Records of Their Ascendants and Descendants, Gathered from the Earliest Available Data to the Present Time, 1958 A. D. By Amos Gingerich. Published by the author, Parnell, Iowa, 1958. Pp. 180, illustrations, index. \$5.00.

This Swartzendruber family history will be of interest to a wider range of readers than those whose names appear in its genealogical lists for in addition to the names of Swartzendruber descendants it contains many pages of entertaining and inspiring reminiscences and frontier stories.

It is, however, primarily the story of Frederick Swartzendruber and his family. He was born in Germany in 1825 and died in Iowa in 1895. His wife Sarah was born in Pennsylvania in 1829. Among the 303 descendant living families whose religious affiliations were furnished, approximately eighty per cent are Mennonites. Thirty of the heads of 316 homes listed in the book are ordained men. Of these thirty a considerable number are widely known in Mennonite circles. The Swartzendruber family through the years it has been in America has produced an unusually large number of able leaders, and so this book will be of interest to those who have known these men as well as to those who wish to study home and environmental factors which help produce church leaders.

Other readers will be attracted by the many pioneer stories appearing in the chapters of reminiscences. These accounts are written mostly by the grandchildren of Frederick Swartzendruber. Among them are sketches from D. B. Swartzendruber, Delila Litwiler, Samuel Kreider, Simon Gingerich, S. C. Yoder, and others. A document of unusual worth is the travel diary of 1833 describing the trip across the Atlantic, written by a member of the travel party. Another valuable document is "Mother's Story," written years ago by J. F. Swartzendruber, describing pioneer life in Iowa. This well written account has previously appeared in several periodicals and ranks high in literary quality.

—Melvin Gingerich

